

THE UBIQUITY OF THE CUMULATIVE RECORD: A QUOTE FROM SKINNER AND A FREQUENCY COUNT

ALAN POLING¹

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

"Changes in rate comprise a vast and largely unsuspected subject matter. (The changes are made conspicuous with a cumulative recorder, the ubiquity of which in the study of operant behavior is no accident. In a cumulative record, rate and changes in rate are visible at a glance. . . .)" (Skinner, 1966, p. 15)

The use of cumulative recorders in the experimental analysis of behavior may remain as commonplace as when the foregoing appeared. In the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, however, the relative frequency of appearance of figures showing cumulative records has decreased consistently across time (Figure 1). Although many variables may have contributed to this decline (e.g., publication of an increased number of nonempirical articles and articles concerned with behaviors not readily represented by cumulative records), the data in Figure 1 seem to underscore a question raised by Ferster (1978) and others: are operant conditioners getting bored with behavior? Time alone will tell, but it is apparent that a collective fondness for a direct and graphic depicor of ongoing behavior—the cumulative record—has faded.

¹Preparation costs were partially defrayed by research grants MH-24593 from the National Institute of Mental Health and 9 R01 01799 from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Reprints may be obtained from Alan Poling, Department of Psychology, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208.

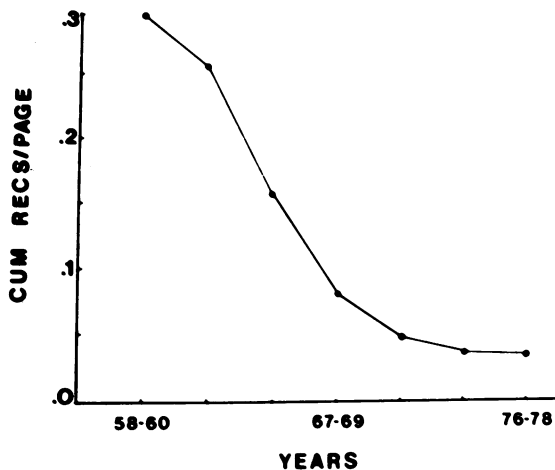


Fig. 1. Number of figures showing cumulative records in the *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior* across blocks of 3 yr. To control for the general increase in the size of the journal across time, data are expressed as figures per page. Only Volume 29 is included in the analysis for 1978.

REFERENCES

- Ferster, C. B. Is operant conditioning getting bored with behavior? A review of Honig and Staddon's *Handbook of operant behavior*. *Journal of the Experimental Analysis of Behavior*, 1978, **29**, 347-349.
 Skinner, B. F. Operant behavior. In W. K. Honig (Ed), *Operant behavior: areas of research and application*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966. P. 15.

Received 20 July 1978.

(Final acceptance 21 July 1978.)